

Chicago Jesuits hid sex crimes



Six men and their attorneys will split a nearly \$20 million sex abuse settlement against a former priest. (WGN-TV)

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Internal church records released Tuesday show that Chicago Jesuits consciously concealed the crimes of convicted sex offender Donald McGuire for more than 40 years as the prominent Roman Catholic priest continued to sexually abuse dozens of children around the globe.

One letter written in 1970 by the Rev. John H. Reinke, then president of Loyola Academy in Wilmette, described McGuire's presence at the school as "positively destructive and corrosive." Instead of insisting he be removed from ministry or sent to treatment, Reinke suggested a transfer to Loyola University.

"This whole situation has been so muddy and troublesome I just wanted to get it out of my mind from time to time," wrote Reinke, who died in 2003. "Anyway, here it is, for the files and the record. ... There is little hope of affecting any change. ... He cannot be corrected."

The documents contributed to a \$19.6 million settlement between the Jesuits and six men from four states announced Tuesday. With an average payout of \$3 million per person, the amount per individual is the largest in the history of the U.S. Catholic sexual abuse crisis, the victims' lawyers said. The settlement and the documents add one more chapter to the still unfolding story of sexual abuse in the church.

While the settlement of the lawsuit against the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus doesn't name any priests accused of abusing minors who have not been previously disclosed to the public, it does name a number of Jesuit superiors who for four decades kept McGuire's crimes a secret and, the victims' attorneys said, enabled him to abuse more young men.

To date, lawyers have identified 28 men who have alleged abuse by McGuire from the 1960s until 2004. Eight have filed lawsuits.

"Jesuits made choices time and time again that demonstrated willful indifference," said Jeff Anderson, the plaintiffs' attorney. "Not one Jesuit official has yet to be prosecuted for their complicity in these crimes."

The Rev. Timothy Kesicki, who as Chicago provincial leads the area's Jesuits, said in a statement that the order is "painfully aware" that it made mistakes and failed to protect children. Many steps have been implemented since 2007 to go above and beyond the policies to protect children passed by the U.S. Catholic bishops, said Jeremy Langford, a spokesman for the Chicago Jesuit province.

"More important, we failed to listen to those who came forward and to meet their courage in dealing with Donald McGuire as we should have," said Kesicki, who has been promoted to lead the Jesuits' national office next year. Lawyers for the victims commended Kesicki for understanding the failure of the order's leadership in protecting children.

As former spiritual director for Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity, McGuire offered Roman Catholic retreats around the globe.

The first allegation of sexual abuse against McGuire or any Jesuit priest in Chicago came in the form of a lawsuit filed in 2003 by a former student at Loyola Academy. The lawsuit alleged that McGuire molested and beat the student more than 100 times in 1968 and 1969. At the time it was filed, the lawsuit also named and accused the Jesuits of failing to inform law enforcement of the boy's complaints.

The Rev. Richard McGurn, assistant to the provincial for the Chicago Jesuits at the time, said the order did not know of allegations of abuse until it received a letter from Anderson 10 days before his client filed the lawsuit. Only then did the order suspend McGuire's priestly functions, prohibiting him from doing public ministry or administering sacraments pending an investigation.

But as McGuire and the allegations against him made their way through various court systems, evidence began to mount that the Jesuits knew all along.

After a second victim from Loyola Academy came forward, Cook County authorities directed the two men to Wisconsin, where they said McGuire molested them during trips to the resort area near Lake Geneva between 1966 and 1968. Unlike Illinois' statute of limitations, Wisconsin's didn't preclude criminal prosecution.

McGuire was convicted in 2006 and sentenced to seven years behind bars and 20 years of probation. Though the prison sentence was postponed pending his appeal, McGuire was jailed three times for violating his probation. Before Wisconsin authorities could have his probation revoked, federal authorities charged McGuire in 2007 with traveling internationally to engage in sexual misconduct with a minor.

That same year, more accusers — six in total — began to report that McGuire had abused them on spiritual retreats. In 2011, documents that Wisconsin prosecutors were told never existed began to surface that showed consecutive Jesuit provincials in Chicago had known the truth about McGuire for a while.

A memo in February 1991 expressed concern about a boy from Anchorage, Alaska, who traveled with McGuire and slept in the same room during a retreat in California. "This travel business is at least very imprudent, perhaps much more serious," wrote the Rev. Robert Wild. He could not be reached for comment.

Another memo, dated April 1993, documented a call from the Rev. Joe Fessio, reporting that McGuire had been accompanied by several young men in Russia, "one of whom he was taking showers with and reading hard pornography." Fessio reportedly contacted the boy's father and "asked him to keep this quiet until he could represent this to McGuire's provincial."

Fessio could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

In 1995, the Rev. Francis Daly, then acting provincial, wrote to McGuire after a mother copied his superiors on a memo telling him to stay away from her son. Daly could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

"Let us hope that no more alleged incidents come to light," Daly wrote. "You must understand the complaints raised in these situations are serious. There must be no more. I am calling you to a prudence greater than that which you have shown in recent years."

In 1998, the Chicago Archdiocese granted McGuire permission to serve in the archdiocese based on a glowing endorsement from his superior, the Rev. Richard Baumann.

"Specifically there is nothing to our knowledge in his background which would restrict any ministry with minors," Baumann wrote.

And in a letter to McGurn in October 2000, a parent reported her son's anxiety over how McGuire had treated him during a yearlong mission. McGurn could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

"He cried as he told us 'he couldn't take it anymore!' He stated that Father was overwhelming him with pornographic pictures and talking to him about sexual matters at every waking moment."

With all of this in mind, lawyers amended the complaint to seek punitive damages against the order. The Jesuits and six men reached a \$19.6 million settlement in January.

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